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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7640

INFO RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

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RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH PRIORITY 0148

RUEHOS/AMCONSUL LAGOS PRIORITY 2417

RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH PRIORITY 0047

RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE PRIORITY

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 002173

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/FO, AF/W, AF/RSA, DRL, INR/AA;

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/30/2019

TAGS: PGOV PREL PINR OVIP NI

SUBJECT: NIGERIAN INFORMATION MINISTER: YAR'ADUA COMATOSE;
VICE PRESIDENT JONATHAN CONCERNED

REF: A. ABUJA 2152

1B. ABUJA 2163

1C. JEDDAH-ABUJA 11/30 TO 12/2

1D. DAO IIR 7-100-0130-10

Classified By: Ambassador Robin Renee Sanders
for reasons in sections 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

11. (S) As a follow-up to an earlier conversation (ref b) Information Minister Dora Akunyili called Ambassador at 11:45 p.m. at her residence December 1 to discuss the state of President Yar'Adua's health, and as another Southerner, the worries of Vice President Goodluck Jonathan if the President dies. Akunyili said she called the Ambassador on a non-government registered phone and waited until she arrived home to conduct her conversation; hence, the late call. Akunyili began by stating that "the country is in a real mess as Yar'Adua has been in and out of a comatose state since his arrival in Saudi, only coming out briefly afternoon of November 30, and since then he has been in a coma." She added that the Vice President is symbolically in charge, but is afraid to show any leadership in this environment given that it might be "misunderstood." Earlier December 1, (see other channels) several associates met with Mission Officer to inform him that the VP was sending emissaries to obtain an assessment of the current environment and to find out how the international community would feel about him acceding to the Presidency if Yar'Adua died. Mission Officer stated our policy of the primacy of following the rule of law and the Constitution. News on the ground has not changed much in the last 24 hours; succession noises are still being made, and we continue to have feelers out all over town (particularly in the military, see ref C on Chief of the Army's comment on military posture), in Saudi and through our very helpful sister Embassy and Consulate General in Saudi Arabia. END SUMMARY.

DRUM BEAT ON YAR'ADUA'S FINAL DAYS CONTINUES

12. (S) In a late night conversation on December 1 with Information Minister Dora Akunyili, who is known as a straight shooter from her days as Director of the National Food and Drug Agency, told the Ambassador that "Nigeria was

in a real mess" at the moment with President Yar'Adua being "in and out of a coma since his arrival in Saudi, but mostly in the last 2 days." She said she doubted that the President could survive this current crisis as he had in the past, noting that he was only conscious enough to talk to a few people on the afternoon of November 30. (NOTE: This account bears out, given that Kwara Governor Saraki told us that he had a very brief chat with the President afternoon of November 30 -- ref A. END NOTE.). Akunyili added that there is no clear leadership right now, because Vice President Goodluck Jonathan is worried, unsure of what to do, and concerned about sending signals that "could be misunderstood at this sensitive stage among northerners." (Please see reporting in other channels for additional Information.) In addition, no one from the Villa (State House) is keeping the VP informed, she said.

¶3. (S) Ambassador asked who was really running the day-to-day tasks of the country as in the past it had unofficially been National Security Advisor Muktar and the Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF). The Information Minister admitted that this remained the case, but noted that Jonathan wanted to step into the light more, but was afraid to do so. Akunyili added that Yar'Adua and Jonathan never had a good relationship, that the President mistrusted him, and that there was always a sense from Yar'Adua that the VP was "just waiting for him to die." She confirmed that Jonathan was sending feelers out to key Northerners on how they were feeling and hoping to get a signal that it was all right to do more leadership at this time. Ambassador asked whether there was anything she thought friends of Nigeria could do at

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this time. Akunyili suggested that the Ambassador send a text message to wish the President well through to his Aide de Camp. (Please see report in other channels.)

JONATHAN OUTREACH EFFORTS

¶4. (S) Earlier on the evening of December 1, a request came to Mission Officer outlining a scenario of having the Ambassador deliver a letter expressing well wishes for the President, but privately signaling the need to follow the Constitution, de facto making the Vice President comfortable that the USG or other international partners would not oppose his ascendancy if it came to this. We have told our interlocutors that it was not possible to act in this manner at this time, given that the President was still alive and still the Head of State of Nigeria. (NOTE: Ref A notes that Jonathan went to see Senate President Mark seeking the same assurances about succession and seeking support that the constitutional process would be followed. Mark said that it would be. END NOTE).

COMMENT

¶5. (S) Clearly, reports of the President in a coma and on a respirator do not bode well for any recovery. In addition, Jonathan's dispatching emissaries around town to take a temperature check on the atmosphere surrounding what may be his, sooner rather than later, ascendancy to the Presidency further leads to the news that the President of Nigeria is in his final days. We are preparing a report (septel) on the baggage that Jonathan will carry with him into State House as there have been past reports of corruption, political thuggery, and payments to "militant factions" from his days as Governor of Bayelsa State as well as questions about his competency in general. Regarding those who might be viewed as the strong Northerners who would become Vice President, there seems to be a changing "short list" that could include the Governors of Bauchi (Yuguda, also a son-in-law of

Yar'Adua), Kwara (Saraki), and Sokoto (Wamako) States at the top. Other strong Northern and ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) personalities who will have a voice in what happens in Nigeria range from former National Security Advisor Aliyu, whom we also understand still desires the Presidency, as well as Senate President David Mark. Former President Ibrahim Babangida, also a strong northern voice, is out of the picture for the moment as he is in California with his wife, whom we understand may be dying of cancer. In addition, we can never discount the influence and voice of former President Obasanjo within the PDP on what to do next as a result of Yar'Adua's passing. We will continue to provide spot reporting from all sources as this situation continues, particularly on the military.

SANDERS